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A N
E N Q U I R Y

W H E T H E R T H E

Christian Religion

Is of any B E N E F I T,

O R O N L Y

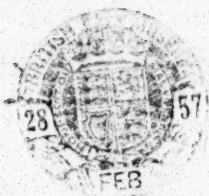
A U S E L E S S C O M M O D I T Y t o
a Trading Nation.



L O N D O N:

Printed for WEAVER BICKERTON, at the
Lord Bacon's Head, the Corner of *Pals-*
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M.DCC.XXXII.

WILLIAMS



WILLIAMS



PREFACE.

THEY are most certainly in the wrong, who maintain that Christianity is of no service to the Nation----when it serves us so excellently well to dispute about----Frequent and diverse have been the Skirmishes between the contending Parties, to the great Emolument of the Town, and the Benefit of the Paper Manufacture; so that in my Conscience I believe there is not a Christian Nation under the Sun that *talks* more of *Religion* than the *English* do. Lately the Forces met, brought it to a
A pitch'd

pitch'd Battel; *Te Deum* was fung afterwards on both sides, as usual; and the Parties are now drawn off till the Season brings on the next Campaign---The Death of Captain-General *C---*, and the knock that *W---*, another Commander, hath received on his Knuckles with the But-end of a Musquet, which has obliged him to drop his Weapon, have thrown the full Power into the Hands of *T---*; and how that wary Gentlemen designs to proceed, is a Secret.

As I have perused most of the Memorials, Representations of the State, Cases, Letters, &c. on both sides, I am in some measure a judge of the Pretensions each makes to the Justice of the Cause---But I shall not take upon me to decide in so important an Affair, as this is;
rather

rather contenting myself with clearing some Objections which I find are raised against the Manners, Conduct, and Parts of these great Men and the rest of their Party.

The elegant Writer of the *Guardian* is pleased to deliver his Sentiments very freely of these Gentlemen, when he speaks of 'em as a
 “ Set of dry, joyless, dull Fellows,
 “ who want Capacities, and Talents to make a Figure amongst
 “ Men upon benevolent and generous Principles; that think to surmount their natural Weakness,
 “ by laying Offences in the way of
 “ such, as make it their business to
 “ excel upon the received Maxims,
 “ and honest Arts of Life.”

The Words Dry, Joyless, Dull, are a heavy Charge upon the Con-

stitutions of these extraordinary Persons, as if nothing but a *Caput mortuum* could be extracted from them: but if that Author had once taken it into his head to account for these several Qualities, he might easily enough have traced 'em up to their Natural Causes.

Their Dryness, may it not proceed from too frequent use of that adust Berry called Coffee, which is well known to be a great Dryer of the Brain? Their Joylessness, may it not be very justly supposed to be owing to want of Money, especially amongst the Subalterns; such as your Six-penny Pamphleteers, your *London* Journalists? &c.

Their Dullness may very well be accounted for, as a natural Mistake. In a very nice Business, every one
knows

knows how difficult it is to be grave, or witty upon proper Occasions. If they are therefore playing the Buffoons, when they should be acting the Wits; or dull and heavy when they should be serious and grave; it is an incidental Mistake, which may happen to an infinite Number of Authors as well as these.

As to the other part of the Charge, I shall not trouble myself about it, being well assured that the Deists are much more concerned to have their Parts, than their Morals, justified to the World.

In the next place, I find the Weapons which are made use of by the Adversaries to Christianity, found fault with; of which, one of the greatest Wits of this Nation, writing to a Man of Quality and fine Taste, thus

thus speaketh--- “ For Blasphemy
 “ and Atheism, if they were nei-
 “ ther Sin nor ill Manners, are Sub-
 “ jects so very common and worn
 “ so threadbare, that People who
 “ have Sense avoid ’em, for fear of
 “ being suspected to have none. It
 “ calls the Good-Name of their
 “ Wit in question, as it does the
 “ Credit of a Citizen when his
 “ Shop is filled with Trumperies
 “ and painted Trifles, instead of
 “ Wares : we conclude ’em Bank-
 “ rupt to all manner of Under-
 “ standing; and, that to use Blas-
 “ phemy is a kind of applying
 “ Pigeons to the Soles of the Feet.
 “ It proclaims their Fancy, as well
 “ as Judgment, to be in a despe-
 “ rate Condition.”

We find this witty Author here
 treats these worthy Wights, as a
 fort

fort of delirious light-headed Persons, who, in the Paroxysms of their Distemperature, are strangely apt to tear and foam, and throw out naughty Words. But as that Ornament of the *English* Nation died before the *Phraseology*, proper for treating of sacred Matters, was brought to perfection, and adjusted to the true Standard, an Improvement owing to those great Genius's, *W. P.* and *W.* all the World must look upon him as an incompetent Judge: and I hope, that in the course of these Papers, I shall lay down such strong and cogent Arguments, for the *Propriety*, *Beauty*, and *Perspicuity* of the *Blasphemous*, as would have made a Convert of that Writer, and drawn him from the severity of this Censure, had he lived to our Times.

The

The next that appears, in the Lists, is a Person, who meerly upon the strength of most consummate Judgment and Ingenuity, doth take upon him, roundly to assert, " That no Gentleman of a
 " liberal Education, and regular
 " in his Morals, did ever profess
 " himself a Free-thinker." And then he goes on, very pertly to ask, " Where then are these kind of
 " People to be found ? Amongst the
 " worst part of the Soldiery, made
 " up of Pages, younger Brothers of
 " obscure Families, and others of
 " desperate Fortunes; or else, among
 " idle Town-Fops, and now
 " and then, a drunken Country
 " Squire." But is not this palpable Injustice? Has he not omitted the Chiefs, the Worthies of this venerable Society, which is well known

known to be compounded of Gentlemen of the Excise, Templers, Merchants Clerks, Clerks to Attorneys, and some inferior Gentlemen, commonly call'd, 'Prentices.

But this is not the worst of his virulency: He rises in it, when he boldly affirms, that the “ Writers
“ against Christianity, since the
“ Revolution, have been of the
“ lowest Rank among Men, in re-
“ gard to Literature, Wit, and good
“ Sense; and upon that account,
“ wholly unqualified to propagate
“ Heresies, unless among a People
“ already abandoned.”

I begin to suspect, that this Gentleman lives some few Miles out of Town, and has not yet heard of the Fame of the Club, or perhaps their Productions may not yet have
a been

been transported to any Place within the Circumference of five Miles round *London*. How many could I name, whom I now have my Eye upon, whose Literature, Wit, and Good-Sense, are all of a-piece, and well known even to a Proverb; so that our bold Assertor is really to be pitied, either for his Ignorance, or else for his Obscurity.

I find likewise, that there are some People who wonder not a little, that Gentlemen of such distinguishing and refined Taste, as infinitely the major Part of the Deists are observ'd to be Masters of, do not apply their free-thinking Qualities to cultivate and raise the Arts and Sciences, and leave the Parsons (whose Trade it is) to squabble about Religion. Observe, say they,
the

the strange Revolution! The Clergy are easy and moderate in their Principles, live and converse like Gentlemen, and with them; the Stiffness and Pedantry of the Gown is almost worn off: They now apply themselves to learn the modern Languages, and are eminent for Polite, as well as Theological Learning. On the other hand, up start another Set of Gentry, Men of Mode, *Petits Maîtres*, and Pretty Fellows, who with a few formal grave Folks at the Head of them, are perpetually tutoring the Age into Irreligion. Now this is a very odd Application of Parts, they say; these fine Gentlemen should by all means confine their Judgments to Wine, Dress, and the Ladies; here they are the *Dernier Resort*, and all the World strikes Sail to their supreme Authority. They, with

their Privy-Counsellors, the Taylors, the Peruke-Makers, and Milliners, are universally allow'd to reform the Nation, and we readily follow their Mode of Thinking in this Respect. But what have Beaux to do with Religion? It is a Solecism, in them, to trouble the inside of the Head with any thing, but what relates to the outside of it. If they should proceed further, in this Affair, who knows what may be the Consequence? Should the Ladies join Issue with them, any Man, without the help of Prophecy, may readily foredoom the fall of Silks and Laces; and the degeneracy of the Nation into Dirt and Slovenliness. I own, this Argument has always appeared formidable to me, because such a Revolution would affect our Trade extremely; and as I am acquainted with

with but one Expedient in the World, to prevent this ill Consequence, I shall readily propose it, for the Benefit and Advantage of my Country: and that is, I advise, that some Mercer, or Lace-man, of Genius, no matter of what Religion, Sect, Party, or Opinion, should immediately set his Brain to work upon a new Pattern, and that with the utmost expedition, and disperse it as soon as possible, that this new and dangerous Whim may be diverted with all Celerity imaginable, before it has taken root too deep. And as to those grave formal Folks, which I mentioned, as at the Head of the others, I must own, that it would be no small pleasure to me to observe, that minute Carefulness and diligent Obscurity, they are allow'd to be Masters of, if possible, more advantageously.

tageously employed. Suppose they were to enter into Grammatical Controversies, and Orthographical Niceties ; or might not *Read* and *Applebee* furnish them with Weekly Opportunities to exert their Skill in Punctuation ! Etymology would be another inexhaustible Fund. The *Thesaurus* of the profound *N. Bailey* would be here of great service. How pleasant a Sight would it be to catch them, with Spectacles on, poring over a *Lilly* ! Or, if any one among them hath *Latin* enough, how entertaining and proper would a *Sanctius*, or a *Scioppius* be ! *Hæ tibi erunt artes* ! --- What a Number of excellent Philologists would this Nation abound with ! How would the Shades of *Scaliger* and *Salmasius* rejoice, when *B---y* shall acquaint them with the agreeable News ? And that some
of

of these Gentlemen do certainly very much need these preparatory Studies, the said Critic hath amply shown.

But notwithstanding all this, I must confess, that the Genius and Manners of the Age keep these Gentlemen in countenance, and afford Plea sufficient----For how many Wits have we without Sense, how many Poets without Numbers, and how many Critics without Learning?

On the other hand, I am not unaware that the Christians are pretty much given to boast of the Number, the Elegance, and the extensive Knowledge of the Espousers of their Party----Among which, they reckon their *Clements*, their *Africanus*'s, their *Eusebius*'s, and their *Jeroms*

roms----But then these old Gentlemen are what I think they call Fathers----A Name which I find mentioned in all good Company with the utmost Disrespect and Contempt---Besides, they wrote a long while ago, and in Languages now almost lost----So that whether they spoke Sense or Nonsense, is unknown; and this Age is too wise to take any thing upon Trust.

After these they produce their *Bacons*, *Newtons*, and *Lockes*, Men famous and renown'd for Inquisitiveness, who spared no pains to master any useful Branch of Literature, and lay under no Biass at all to dissemble or conceal any thing of real concern to their Countrymen; but were legitimate true-born Freethinkers, in the right Sense of the Word.

These

These indeed wrote in *English*, and their Writings are as yet in being, and I believe may be seen in some Booksellers Shops, and some Libraries likewise; but then their Language is in general so obscure, their Subjects so abstruse, and ill chosen, that most Gentlemen who have any Stock of Wit of their own Growth, choose to divert themselves with that, rather than such Ultramontane Productions.

Of Wits likewise the Christians number not a few. They count over their *Spencers*, *Cowleys*, *Addisons*, &c. These Writers are more to the public *Gout*, more read, and something easier understood.

Now in opposition to this Cloud of Witnesses, the Deists likewise
b draw

draw out their Heroes----Their *Blounts*, their *Gildons*, their *Tolands*, their *Tindals*, their *Collins's*; and, to sum up all in one, their *Woolstons* : These Learned, Witty, and Polite Writers, have at last fully convinced the Town, that our Forefathers were a pack of Asses; that the World has been in an Error for some thousands of Years; and that all the People upon Earth, excepting themselves and some few more worthy Gentlemen, are imposed upon, cheated, bubbled, and abused.

These are the great Truths which are now propagated; and such are the great Preachers and Maintainers of them. Science is now thrown into a different Channel, Learning increases without Study, Wit without Thought; and Religion, like
Merit

Merit in Distress, is become the Jest of every body.

Notwithstanding the Improvement which hath been lately made, and the Revolutions which have happened in the Empire of Sense and Understanding, I am suspicious that there are still too many Remains of the old Leaven.

Some Gentlemen are like old Beaux, for retaining what was fashionable in their Youth.

Among several of this whimsical Opinion, I must place the Author of the following Letter----A Nobleman, who not many Years ago was esteemed among the most Witty and Polite Part of Mankind; but as he was of a singular Taste, how his Lordship would keep his Countenance

now, I cannot tell : I only propose it as the Learned do their Anecdotes, and Scraps of Antiquity ; they discover the Sentiments of the Ages they were wrote in.

It is to a Nephew of his, upon his entring into, what was then called Holy Orders. I take the pains of transcribing it for the Public, and they may either laugh at it for its Simplicity, or admire it for its being out of the Fashion, or just as they please.

DEAR NEPHEW,

“ I Approve very well of your
 “ Resolution of Dedicating
 “ your self to the Service of GOD.
 “ You could not choose a better
 “ Master ; provided you have suffi-
 “ ciently searched your Heart, and
 “ examined your Reins, as to be
 “ per-

“ persuaded you can serve him
“ well ; in so doing, you may se-
“ cure to your self many Blessings
“ in this World, as well as sure
“ Hope in the next.

“ There is one thing, which, I
“ perceive, you have not thorough-
“ ly cleared yourself from, that is,
“ Flattery. You have bestow'd so
“ much of it upon me, in your last
“ Letter, that I hope you have no
“ more left, and that you meant
“ it only to take leave of such
“ Flights ; which, however well
“ meant, oftener put a Man out
“ of countenance than oblige him.

“ You are now become a Search-
“ er after Truth, and I shall here-
“ after take it more kindly to be
“ justly reprov'd by you, than to
“ be undeservedly complimented.
“ I

“ I would not have you misunder-
“ stand me, as if I recommended
“ to you a four Presbyterian Seve-
“ rity ; that is yet more to be a-
“ voided.

“ Advice, like Physick, must be
“ sweeten'd and prepared, to be
“ made palatable, or Nature may
“ be apt to revolt against it. Be
“ always sincere, but at the same
“ time always polite. Be humble,
“ without descending from your
“ Character ; and Reprove, and
“ Correct without offending a-
“ gainst good Manners. To be a
“ Cynick, is as bad as to be a Syco-
“ phant. You are not to lay aside
“ the Gentleman, with the Sword,
“ nor put on the Gown to hide
“ your Birth and Good Breeding,
“ but to adorn it.

“ Such

“ Such has been the Malice of
“ the Wicked, that Pride, Avarice
“ and Ambition, have been charg-
“ ed upon the Clergy, in all Ages,
“ in all Countries, and equally in
“ all Religions. What they are
“ most obliged to combat against
“ in the Pulpit, they are most ac-
“ cused of encouraging in their
“ Conduct.

“ You had an Uncle whose
“ Memory I shall ever revere :
“ Make him your Example. Sanc-
“ tity fate so easy, so unaffected,
“ and so graceful upon him, that
“ in him we beheld the very Beau-
“ ty of Holiness. He was as chear-
“ ful, as familiar, as condescend-
“ ing in his Conversation, as he was
“ strict, regular, and exemplary in
“ his Piety ; as well-bred and accom-
“ plished

“ plished as a Courtier, and as re-
“ verend and venerable as an A-
“ postle.

“ He was indeed Apostolical in
“ every thing; for he abandon'd
“ all to follow his Lord and Master.

“ May he revive in you. May
“ his Spirit descend upon you, as
“ *Elijah's* on *Elisba*: And may
“ the Great GOD of Heaven, in
“ guiding, directing, and strength-
“ ning your Pious Resolutions,
“ pour down the choicest of his
“ Blessings upon You.”





INTRODUCTION:
TO THE
D E I S T S.

GENTLEMEN,

AS this Piece is wrote to celebrate your admirable Writings and useful Designs, so I hope that you will be pleased to become the Patrons of it: It very properly belongs to you; I hang it up therefore in Public, as a Picture for common Sight, that every body may judge whether I have done justice to so bright Originals.

Some of you, Gentlemen, are arrived at the Reputation of Apostolical Deists, the great Missionaries sent to preach down Christianity, and reconvert the World to Heathenism.

And I am told, that your Seers, (who see double at Midnight, when fired with the
B Enthusiastic

Enthusiastic God) have foreseen, that hereafter, when your devout Scheme shall have taken place in the World, all Churches shall be demolished to their Foundations, their Crosses broken into ten thousand Pieces; no Man shall dare be so impious as to wear the superstitious Gown and Cassock, or once to mention the Name of JESUS; whilst high in Air shall rise the Statues of *Collins*, *Tindal*, *Woolston*, their Pestestals describing their Exploits.—Here Bibles torn—There Common-Prayer Books fluttering into Shreds----whilst the poor Parsons shudder at the sight, and fly for fear; at the Base lies that dire Dread of you Deists, Hydra Religion, expiring under the Attack of another *Hercules*, with *Nos exæquat Victoria Cælo* flaming out of his Mouth.

These are your Triumphs, your Exploits, O Deists! when this great Æra is to begin; when Time shall no longer be reckoned by dull *Anno Domini*'s, but from the lasting famous Epoche of Religion destroyed. I can't tell whether your own Prophets have fully and determinately predicted: but as I am certain the Thought is pleasing to you, tho' in Speculation only, so I make bold to inscribe the Piece to your Worships Praise and Glory.



A N

ENQUIRY

W H E T H E R

CHRISTIANITY

Is of any Use or Advantage to the
N A T I O N .

IT is the Duty of every Man, when he meets with any thing meritorious, to give it its due praise ; Persons as well as Things claim an Acknowledgment from us, upon this Account. When any Man, either with the Labour of his Hands, or the Labour of his Brains, hath produced into the World any notable Piece, the Artist should receive Applause in proportion to the Excellency of his Work.

For my own part, I am of so inquisitive, and of so benevolent a Temper, that as few

Pieces which make any noise in the World escape my perusal; so I am never wanting in paying the Debt of Thanksgiving. Accordingly, I think that it is not possible to give a stronger Proof of my Inclination this way, than I do by entering upon this Design, formed merely for the sake of three extraordinary Writers, from whose Works I have received so much Benefit and Illumination.

The three devout Writers, to whom I profess myself so much obliged, are, the late Mr. *Collins*, so famous for his Integrity in quoting Brother Writers; Dr. *Tindal*, no less illustrious for the Profundity of his Reasoning and the contemptuous Sneer; and lastly, the Reverend Mr. *Woolston*, best known for the Modesty and Continency of his Expressions.

This Triumvirate of Writers is a fair Topic for Panegyric, who breaking through the old *English* painful Taciturnity, have exerted their Talents in a peculiar Manner, to the great Erudition of this honest Town; which I heartily congratulate upon the Improvement we may now expect in the Manners and Morals of our Youth.

Natural Liberty shall now no longer be curbed by the Bonds of Religion, which shall scarce be able to fright even Children and Nurses; Parsons shall no longer believe what they tell; whilst these noble *Epicureans*

reens shall be our Teachers, their Works our Bibles, and the *London Journal* our Apocrypha.

Such wonderful Revolutions are expected from the happy Labours of these pious Authors, the Managers of free and impartial Debates. For free, indeed, have they been with what *Englishmen* consent to call Sacred. But what of that? It was only a foolish Trick they had got, a ridiculous Custom they should be laugh'd out of.

I would not be understood to deny that great Advantages have not resulted from the Allowance of free Debates upon Religious Subjects, when managed with Decency and Good-Manners. Hence it has happened, that we now understand our Bible better than ever; hence the utter defeat of all Systematical Divines, who so long cramp Men's Minds, and gave authority to Error. The World is not now enslaved by great Names; a Writer is valued only as he talks Sense and Reason.

Hence your *B--tt--ys* and your *B--wm--ns* presently became the ridicule of the Town; whilst a *G--bf--n*, a *Sh--rl--ck*, and a *Cl--rk*, were read with delight.

For Truth (as the old Philosopher said) lying at the bottom of a Pit, a great deal of Rubbish must be removed before we can arrive at her. In some former Ages it was pretty

pretty much the custom to throw Dirt in upon her, and secure her at the Bottom : but when once Liberty was granted to dig for her, some Men set heartily to work, got her out, and had well nigh cleansed her Face, that you might almost see what she was made of ; when up started these Blades, and immediately fell a pelting, dashing, and daubing her again.

Not that I am a Man of such unfashionable Principles, as to deny, that substantial Reasons may be given why some particular Persons should be allowed full and plenary Power to be smart upon Religion, brisk upon the Parsons, smoak a Doctor or a Bishop, and throw out a little Blasphemy now and then.

Especially, if a Man can produce a Warrant that he can never pass for a Wit, if debarred this Liberty.

Wit without Freedom is like Wine without Toasting, insipid to a brisk Man. It's surely by this time out of its Infancy, and does not need either Hanging-Sleeves or a Go-Cart, and should never be confined by the formal Restraints of Sense and Religion.

Or, if an Author desires this Privilege, why, let him swear, or get his Bookseller to swear for him, a trusty Voucher in such a Case, that unless he is allowed this benefit of adorning his Writings with such little Pleasantries

fantries and Heightnings, he must inevitably starve; because he has no other Method of keeping up the Attention of the courteous Reader, or making his Wares vendible.

If any Writer for a Bookseller, whose Master knows how to time a Piece well, should stand in need of some Grains of Allowance this way—Why let the Patent be drawn---Allowed so much Blasphemy by way of Trade, to support and carry on Business.

All this is only giving proper Encouragement to Adventurers for Fame, keeping many a poor Author from being a burden to a Goal; for the Use of the Paper Manufacture, for the Increase of Business, as at present managed by some of our conscientious Booksellers: and I am certain Religion is too charitable to deny so many honest Men, of so many different Callings, the proper ways of sustaining themselves, tho' it be a little at her own expence.

But however it may be adviseable in them, to take notice that there is a queer sort of People in this Town, Fellows who read for Improvement, and expect to be made something better for the Money they lay out; such as these inflexibly maintain that Time is a most valuable Jewel, and should not be fool'd away, either in composing or reading Trifles: and since we must give an account of it, we
should

should endeavour to give as good a one as we can.

But in answer to these whimsical Gentlemen, who are for carrying things to such a monstrous Height, I must take the liberty of quoting an old Maxim against 'em, " That no Man is bound to an impossible thing"; and if they please to give themselves the trouble of examining the Writings of most of these Genius's, I am certain that they will find their Abilities such, that greater Matters could not be expected.

Besides, neither did this Fry, which has of late been spawned amongst us, intend their Productions for Men of this unaccountable Taste, but for those of their own; and every body allows that no Man is answerable for more than he intends.

Neither would these Gentlemen be so severe, if they would but farther be pleased to reflect, that some may write to eat, solid Dinners, not empty Praise, is their Aim; and really 'tis observed, that this way some of them have succeeded very well, for tho' they speak never so ill of Christianity, 'tis still the best Friend they have, for they live by it.

The Method they take is this. They know full well that the Religion of their Country is a common Concern; a bold Attack raises People's Curiosity, and furnishes new Topics of Conversation; the Arts and Sciences are

confined to a few Persons only, and Exactness in Writing is a laborious Task ; wisely therefore make they choice of the other Subject, and then their business is only to say something bold, new, what no body has said before 'em, or will say after 'em; and they dine very comfortably for half a year after.

Now as I have already shown myself so much their Friend, I hope they will excuse me, whilst I tell 'em that it is their Interest to shift their Quarters as often as they can : by Quarters I don't mean their Lodgings, but the manner of attacking the Religion of their Country. It is high time a new Topic were started, which might bring in fresh Gains and better Dinners. And really I don't know but the USE of CHRISTIANITY may be a Subject that will be literally worth while.

Whether it's worth keeping or not? Or whether they can find a better in its stead? Or, whether 'tis not best to have none at all?

And first, of the last, I don't believe they will upon Reflection apprehend it best to have no Religion at all ; for then they can have none to write against, and so they themselves must sink with Religion : for I am certain they cannot live by any other Topic.

Now whether they can find a better in its stead, I don't know; a better to their Purpose, I much doubt: for they are permitted to say what they please of it, and yet we are not surprized, for no body expects any signs of Grace in such Wits.

But whether Christianity is of any Use, may admit of much Argument to the great Emolument of the Writer.

How reasonably may it be pretended, that if Christianity be of Advantage to the Clergy only, no body can, in policy, blame them for defending it; so likewise, if it is of no advantage to any else, can the Clergy blame others for opposing it. It costs the Nation great Sums to maintain it, and should not a Trading Nation be more wise than to keep a USELESS COMMODITY upon their hands.

But however, leaving them to do just as they please, I shall after my own manner enquire into the Use of this Religion, taking all possible care not to forestall the Market.

Before we can certainly conclude that Christianity is useless, we should, I think, first know what it is: it is, indeed, acknowledged, that the contrary is the most decisive Method. But having time enough upon my Hands, I hope I shall be excused if I throw some of it away upon this Question,

Question, tho' it is conceived to be not very material.

One would imagine some Men were given to play strange Tricks with Religion, from the common Distrust of the good People of *England*. For tho' it is apprehended, that we certainly have the Religion of JESUS among us; yet there are so many Counterfeits abroad, that every Man is afraid of being shown to the wrong Door.

Go with one Croud, and you find so much Ceremony and Complement, that a plain Man is glad to get out again as soon as he can. But if a Man should have the patience to persevere, why they introduce you into an inner Room, where you behold a smirking Figure, patch'd and painted, glaring in all the Colours of the Rainbow, who with so many fine Speeches, soft Looks, and pretty Airs, endeavours to put herself off upon the Multitude.

If you go with another Croud, why you are led into a little dirty confined Place; in a corner of which, sits an ill-look'd aukward Piece in Dishabillé, pleased with a secret Pride of being negligent of Mankind, and receiving every body with so forbidding a Face, that a Man who has the least companionable Quality in him, is immediately choaked at her presence.

Several Tire-women besides, who have wrought upon Patterns of their own Invention, have dress'd out such uncouth Figures, in such odd, ill-chosen, ridiculous Colours, that a Man of no very mercurial Complexion is extremely stimulated to laugh at them.

The Truth of the Matter, without any Figure, is, that some Friends, as well as some Enemies, have done Christianity a great deal of harm; and that the Pride, Folly, Interest, Weakness, too much Reading, and too little Sense of both Parties, have promiscuously conspired to oppose her. This is a fatality the best things are most exposed to, as a good Man's Reputation may be injured, whilst no body troubles their head with a Scoundrel.

To give a short Sketch of the Changes she has run through. At first Religion was like the Place she came from, mild and merciful; afterward she was turned into a Fury, fierce and implacable. Her Dictates were plain and easy at first, afterward all involved in Mystery and Darknes, as if Religion was only to be wondered at.

She came to make Men mild, and sociable to Man; within a while, and she obliged Men to turn out of Society, thrust 'em into Caves and Desarts, and converted them into Holy Drones: the Distinctions of *Aristotle* were

were brought in to illustrate the Doctrines of JESUS, and the Schoolmen came and nicely explained its Morality quite away. To compleat the Scene, Princes turned Priests, and Priests were metamorphosed into Princes.

This is the Game that hath been plaid. But of late Mankind have begun to understand Play something better, and have not had the Doctors topp'd upon 'em so frequently.

But now to arrive at a fair View of the Religion of JESUS, and to set it in contraste, the *best* Light; let the several true Conductors of Mankind pass before us in their Natural Order.

The first was the Religion of Nature: How long this Empress maintained her Golden Sway, and kept the World in awe, is undetermined---probably but a short time---For the most ancient Histories are full of nothing but the Guilt, Fear, Superstition, Meanness, and Ignorance of Man, as high as we can trace 'em up---The higher, the more superstitious, the less instructed and more erroneous.

Policy and Superstition, I believe, soon work'd her out of her easy Reign---her Voice was so shrill to be heard by the noisy, busy Multitude, who had not time to listen to her Whispers. Besides, she was too plain

a Lady for a Queen; she wanted the Ensigns of Power, the Axes, and Rods, and Liſtors; the Vulgar muſt be taken by the Eye: ſo that her Power was ſoon ſhared between the Prince, the Priest, and the Poet. She was ſoon loſt in Tradition----And as at the beginning they had no other Books but their Poets, and thence drew Inſtruction; all Religion and Hiſtory too were contained in their Writings; neither had they any *Traditions* more certain than thoſe *Fables* which appear ſo *ridiculous* to us. And for Religion, their Poets were their Prophets; they were look'd upon as the Friends of the Gods, and inſpired Men, and by what we find in their Writings, let us judge of the advantageous Situation of Mankind in their Days-----Is not *Hefiod's* Theogony an excellent System of Faith, and a ſpecial Ground for an exact and ſound Scheme of Morality?

As Mankind grew more refined, Philoſophy came in to Nature's Aid; many Errors ſhe diſcovered, corrected vicious Practices, freed Men from ſlavish Fears, and explained the Deſigns of Nature. Virtue was now ſhown in its moſt beautiful Light, adorned with all the Charms of Eloquence, and dreſs'd out to the greateſt advantage. The Pleaſure, the Excellency, the Self-Sufficiency

ency of Virtue were Topics the noble Morallists insisted on---For *Socrates*, a Man of the best right Sense, observing the Speculations of the major Part of Mankind, how curious, how useless they were, first began to apply himself to make Man better, by cultivating the Powers of the Mind, by reasoning justly, and applying that Reason to the Conduct of Life. Thus he added to Philosophy (which before consisted of mere Physical Disquisitions) Morality and Logic—During his Time, and that of his chief Disciples, this Philosophy was the Employment of the wisest and greatest Men of those Ages, and not the trifling Amusement of raw unexperienced Youths.

The most noble and most considerable Men were its Patrons and Defenders. *Plato* was descended from *Codrus* and *Solon*, and *Zenophon* was one of the greatest Commanders of his Time; besides innumerable others of the best Quality, who professedly maintained and supported this noble Design. The Courts likewise of the Kings of *Egypt*, *Syria*, and *Macedonia* were full of Philosophers; and Science and Virtue were jointly propagated. Thus a new Light broke in upon Mankind, their Minds were exalted and refined, and Virtue became the Learning and Politeness of several Nations.

But at length, unhappily, Philosophy fell into Neglect through the fault of the Successors of these great Men, who had turned it into a continual War of idle Disputes, or else a mere Pretext to cover their Vices. Multitudes of 'em talked in high Terms of Morality, but few were found to practise it. Many professed it merely to make their Court to Princes, or get Money by it---And if this was not enough to hurt its Reputation, they quarrelled so much about it, and every Sect treated each other as Fools and Madmen, that all of 'em became ridiculous.

The true Key of Nature, by degrees, was lost, her Operations not understood, and so wrongly accounted for---Worlds began to be built by Chance, Deity was excluded, Providence denied, the Senses doubted, and poor Virtue a mere Problem.

Thus a wrong Philosophy was introduced, Mankind erred by Rule, and grew vicious upon Principle. This I apprehend to be the true History of the World in the *pious* Days of *Natural Religion*, and have frequently wondered how these Times came to be so much in favour, and the Subject of such high Commendation with some Men, when Priestcraft and Superstition ruled without controul; and the Consequences of these, the grossest and most monstrous

monstrous Absurdities, were Parts of the Religious Ceremonies of the most understanding and polite Nations.

At length a Philosophy, much more sublime appeared in the World, said to be taught by God, and sent from Heaven to set Men right, to restore the Rule of Human Life, and to give Encouragement to walk by it.

And now let us examine the Dictates of this Guide, whether the Directions she brings are conformable to the Sentiments within.

1. JESUS, a Teacher said to be sent from God, instructed the World in the Belief of one God, Creator, Preserver of every Thing, the Universal Parent and Provider, Supreme Arbiter and Governor of all; of a Spiritual, Incomprehensible Nature and Essence, Eternal, Immutable, Omnipresent, Omniscient, All-wise and Powerful, Good, Merciful, Just, and Holy.

2. Having drawn aside the Veil, and displayed Heaven to Mortal Sight—He taught the World to pay him reasonable and acceptable Service; which, he said, consisted in loving the Supreme Being, revering him, thanking him for his Good-

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ness, begging his Protection, and suing for his Grace; in imitating him in Goodness, Mercy, Justice, Truth, and Holiness, in real Sanctity, the Tribute of the Heart, and Worship of the Mind.

3. He acquainted the World, that God commanded all Men, as they hoped for his Favour, to shun every kind of Injustice; Murder, Adultery, Theft, Fraud, Oppression, false Witness; to render to every Man his Due; to live in Love, Peace, and Concord, to do all Good, and forgive all Harm, to be Candid, Humane, and Generous, true and sincere in every Word and Action——Nay, that it was not enough, not only not to do Murther, but that 'tis a Sin to be rash and uncharitable; that it was not enough not to commit Adultery, but that Men must guard against the first Spring of Desire, watch the Eye, and restrain the rising Passion; that we must not only forgive Injuries, but that 'tis criminal not to forgive: That the Lustful must not gaze, the Intemperate must mortify, and the Passionate stifle his Rage.

4. To strengthen the Bonds of civil Life yet further, this Teacher held, that Marriages were not lightly to be dissolved, that the Union of one Man and one Woman

man was the Source of Domestic Joy; that their Children were their common Care, to be brought up with Lenity and Mildness; and that they in return, should repay all Duty, Gratitude and Obedience; that Servants must be faithful, Masters not austere; and that every Man must render to every Man his Due, Tribute, Custom, Fear, and Honour proportionably; and that in our private Stations, we must be Humble, Modest, Chaste, Temperate and Diligent.

5. And finally, to crown the whole, he acquainted the World that he was commissioned to inform 'em, that there was another Scene of Action after this present, a State of Retribution, where Virtue would be placed out of the Reach of Fortune, ever happy; and Vice thrust down to dwell with Shame and Anguish.

Now let us stop, review this Philosophy, and ask a few Questions.

1. Has JESUS taught Mankind, justly and truly to apprehend the Nature and Perfections of the Supreme Being? Has he described him such as the unprejudiced Reason of the greatest and most thoughtful Men, have conceived him to be? Is

there any thing in his Theology disagreeable to the Reason of Mankind, any thing superstitious, any thing frightful, instead of what is lovely and truly adorable ?

2. Are our Services to, and Adorations of the Deity reasonably stated, and rightly founded ?

3. Are the Duties we mutually owe to one another impartially, completely, and strongly urged upon every one of us agreeably to the several Relations we stand in one to another ?

4. Is that Reverence we should have for ourselves, that Restraint we should hold over our own Passions, agreeably to the Bounds of Modesty, Decency, and Temperance, taught with that Force it should be ?

5. Is it of any advantage to the general Practice of Virtue, that the generality of Mankind should be assured and confirmed in the Belief of a State of Rewards and Punishments.

These are Questions which concern the very Vitals of Christianity ; and if the Reply in Reason and Justice falls on the side of this Religion, it is in fact more Rational than any Philosophy ever yet taught by Men, more useful to Society than any
Doctrines

Doctrines ever yet published, more corroborative of Virtue than any Scheme yet laid down—But I propose these Questions chiefly to the Deists, let them consider 'em a little, and give Answers to 'em.

Do they apprehend that Christianity is in the Interest of a Deity, Virtue, Society, or not? Let 'em speak out; for my own part I cannot but assert, that it appears to me to be vastly superior to any human Philosophy, more pure, just, and more generally useful to preserve in the World right Notions of the Deity, our Duty to him, to others, to ourselves; and I should be glad likewise, if any Man among the Deists would rise up, and give his Countrymen a Reason, why in their Writings they use it so *coarsely*. For tho' they can't allow it to be a Divine Revelation, one might expect to see some Regard shown to it, merely for its Excellency and Goodness. But this none of 'em, or few pay to it---but are generally apt to treat it in a contemptuous sneering Manner---It would be too hard to say, that none of those Deists who endeavour to expose it to the Contempt of Mankind, who buffoon and blaspheme it, can possibly be in the Interest of a Deity, Virtue and Society---But it would be well in them to
consider

consider what Interest they serve, by throwing these Firebrands about.

If any Man should object, that I have not drawn up a complete Representation of Christianity; I own I have not in all its Points----Neither was that my Design----But only to show the chief View, the Grand Design and End of it. Its Articles of Faith, and instituted Means, I have not touch'd upon----they carry on the same Design, point the same way, and are so many new Obligations upon all who believe and practise 'em, to become better Men in every Station and Condition of human Life. So that were I to delineate this Religion, I should call it--
A compleat Collection of the Laws of Nature, published by God himself, for the Benefit of Mankind, to deliver 'em from Error, Perplexity, and Superstition; to which he has annexed the strongest Engagements possible upon his Creatures to pursue their own Happiness.

Whence it has happened, that this Grand Design has been in some Ages of the Church, nay, is at present in some Parts of *Christendom* so fatally perverted; whence it has happened that such Numbers of Christians are so far from being delivered from Error, Perplexity, and Superstition,

perstition, that they are overwhelmed with the thickest, most Pagan, palpable Darkness; whence this Catastrophe has happened, (a Point too plain to be denied) is not perhaps so difficult but it may be accounted for.

It is sufficient at present to say, that if the Law of Nature, written in Men's Hearts, may by Wilfulness or Artifice, or Carelessness be obliterated; it can by no means be any wonder, that by the same Methods, the Revealed Will written on perishable Paper, should by wrong Interpretations, and forced Constructions, be made subservient to political Views and scurvy Designs.

It may, perhaps, be an invidious and unfair Question to ask, Whether the true Religion of JESUS would be of any advantage to a Nation, since there are so many Nations, where it would occasion terrible Revolutions, and make such work amongst Hoods, Cowls, Crostiers, Mitres, &c. But as this is not the Case among us, it may be every honest Clergyman's real Interest, and that a noble Service to his Country too, to put a Separation between the Doctrines of Men and the Commandments of God.

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That there is some difference, I suppose, no body will deny---and as I am certain that the Man who incorporates them, receives and defends 'em upon the same bottom, only exposes Religion to the Contempt and Derision of Infidels---so none who dis-join and distinguish 'em but are easily able to support and maintain the Truth of the Gospel, against all their wild Schemes and profligate Attempts.

I challenge therefore the Body Corporate of Infidels to show their Countrymen, upon what Foundation we may possibly be made better Friends, Neighbours, Subjects, Countrymen, Fathers, Husbands, Sons, Brethren, or any of the Relations and Friendships of human Life, than upon the real Scheme of the Gospel---Let 'em do this, and I'll promise 'em one Convert.

Suppose they were to try the Expedient, and the Fathers of Infidelity were to sit down and collect all the Moral Sayings out of *Plato, Stobæus, Tully, Plutarch*, &c. who doubts but it would contain excellent Precepts? What then? We are in possession of the Quintessence of all of them---with this additional Advantage, that nine Parts in ten among *Englishmen* believe themselves bound to practise

practise them, not only because they are reasonable in themselves, but likewise because God has expressly, and by Revelation, commanded 'em to do so for their own advantage.

I am a plain Man, and as polite Men value *Horace* for his genteel Rules, in the Conduct of Courtly Life, so I have the greatest Reverence for JESUS upon account of the Plainness, Honesty, and Excellency of his Religion: the Grand Design, Purpose, and Use of which, is, to render Mankind happy and easy in all their mutual Intercourses one with another, and to prepare them by the constant Course of Virtue and Piety, for a better State hereafter to be revealed.

Whether such a Design as this should be treated in a coarse Manner, or whether any Friend to Mankind can think it proper to throw out base and contumelious Expressions against so advantageous, so humane, so heavenly an Intention---Let them consider who are most concerned. If I have not hit upon the true Reason of this Conduct in the foregoing Part of this Enquiry, I should be glad to have a better given me by some of that wise Body.

How far those Gentlemen, who are pleased to use Christianity so freely, do

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service to Morality and human Duties, when they have considered the five Questions, let them answer and judge for themselves. What mighty Advantages Society reaps from their excellent Labours, we shall farther see, by enquiring a little into the *Genius* of that Religion they are disposed to be so merry with.

'Tis certain the Mind of Man is very much influenced by his Belief: Our Tempers are insensibly disposed and formed to the Nature and Temper of that; nay, we even catch a particular Manner of Thinking and Acting, according to the different Casts of that Religion we are educated in. Custom moulds our Behaviour, and by degrees fixes that constitutional Turn which distinguishes one Faith from another. So that a Man becomes morose or good-natured, harsh or mild, open or reserved, superstitious or not, cruel or humane, according as the Religion he embraces has more or less of these several Qualities in it.

The Temper of a Religion therefore is an Argument for or against it; so that if Christianity be of a morose, harsh, reserved, superstitious, cruel Cast, these are such ill-favoured Qualities that Mankind had better be without it, than have a Religion
only

only to darken and cloud all the Enjoyments of Life.

But will the Deists undertake to prove to the World that it's unfit for Men, that it is dark, and sower, and comfortless, and prejudicial to social Virtues?---If they can do this, away with it, the sooner the better.

But are they sure they are able to make this Point out, that Christianity inclines Men to Doggedness, Suspicion, and Sourness; that it excites us to Fierceness and Cruelty; that it blows up hot Zeal, and spirits Men to destroy one another; that it forbids us to forgive, and teaches us to demand Vengeance; that it sets us to call Fire from Heaven, and for Religion's sake commands us to stab our dearest Friend? Does it thus rage and burn, lay Nature waste, destroy all it shines upon?

For my own part, I always conceived it to be of an open, candid, generous Temper; that it formed Mankind to Meekness, Gentleness and Tenderneſs; that it endeavoured to allay the Bursts of Passion, and to soften our Natures. We are told that the Love of Mankind is a manifest Token of our Love to God; we are commanded to look on all the World with Benignity, to imitate the Saviour of it, mild in our Re-

proofs ; “ Ye know not what Spirit ye are
 “ of ; the Gospel was not sent to destroy,
 “ but to save.”

In truth I know not what I can liken
 it to so properly, as the Influence of the
 Sun in the Spring Season, cherishing and
 enlivening all Nature with its gentle
 Warmth, and disposing the Earth to pro-
 duce its various Fruits for the Service of
 Mankind.

Neither do I find that an honest Man
 with all the Frailties of his Nature about
 him, has any thing to dread from this
 Religion.

Christianity is no frightful Spectre, no
 Fury ever shaking her Snakes, and hover-
 ing over us with horrible Aspect----Let
Lucretius rally the idle Fears and vision-
 ary Horrors a Heathen might be filled
 with, by their Religious Customs ; he
 might shake at a Dream, be startled at an
 Omen, be scared at a Flight of Birds,
 and wash, and sacrifice, and purify for
 imaginary Impurities twenty times a day.
 And what then ? What's this to Christi-
 anity ?

Some Writers seem very fond of this
 Charge ; their Prejudices won't give them
 leave to separate between the true Reli-
 gion of JESUS, and the superstitious Prac-
 tices

tices of some of his Votaries ; and so they run into the Arms of Atheism, for fear Superstition should overtake them.

But is it Superstition to live righteously, soberly, and godly ; to beg a Blessing when we stand in need, or ask a Pardon when we have offended ? Is it Superstition to own solemnly our Dependance upon the Protection of our Creator, and recommend ourselves to his Care.

Are Christians commanded to retire to a Convent, to fly the Conversation of Mankind, and consume Life in Contemplation ? Are they bid to macerate the Flesh with Penance, tear it with Scourges, and waste whole Nights over Books of Devotion.

Such things are practised by Christians, but by mistaken ones.

This is all Monkery---the greatest Foe Religion has, because it frights Men from her Embraces.

But what reasonable Pleasures are forbid us ? May not a Christian be as polite and delicate in his Taste as any other Man ? Every Entertainment that good Sense will warrant, he may appear at ; His Pleasures are not curbed and restrained, they are only regulated and chastized.

Then

Then as to the Sentiments of the Author of this Religion, and the first Propagators of it, they are lively Images of honest upright Souls, warmly concerned in the Welfare of Mankind, every where inspiring Obedience to Righteous Laws, recommending Humanity, Justice, Temperance, degrading Vice, and discountenancing Luxury, Licentiousness of Manners, Injustice and Malice----There is not a Vice that plagues Society, but it is in the gentlest and most affectionate manner endeavoured to be rooted out----Nor is there a Virtue useful to Mankind it does not in the most forcible Terms, and with the strongest Arguments recommend.

Besides, Christianity is so extensively good-natured, that it makes every Man a Neighbour---No matter for Distance of Place; the Gospel, like some Glasses, draws the most distant Objects to us, and places them in view. It would have been an invincible Objection, had it confined its Charity within its own Limits, had it taught Humanity only to those of its own Persuasion. But it is circumscribed within no other Bounds than those of the whole World; it makes all Mankind Brethren, unites the most distant Inhabitants
of

of the Globe, and makes all Nations one great Family.

All that I can add in its behalf, is, that it would be much better for Mankind, were they more conformed to, and actuated by the true Spirit of the Gospel, than they seem to be inclined to at present---Envies, Animosities, Brawls, and Contentions would be no more heard of; War would hide its bloody and detested Head, and Peace extend its Olive Branches over the Nations---The Midnight Rake would leave his Revels, and the Sot his nauseous endless Draughts ---Friends would not die by Friends Hands, provoked by Trifles, and piqued by false Principles of Honour ----Chastity might regain its ancient Place amidst the Virtues, and Adultery be no longer stiled Gallantry--Nay, Ladies might possibly love their Children and Families more than even Cards and Dice, or Lap-Dogs, and Monkeys ; and L--ds perhaps discharge other Debts than those of Honour.

These are some of the Effects which might follow from a Christian World; I might enumerate others, such as the Annihilation of Bawds and Pimps ; the Amputation of several Branches of those very necessary Occupations, Surgeons and China-Shops,

Shops, the Destruction of Gaming-Tables, and the Loss of those full-mouth'd Expletives, called Oaths; together with the Substitution of Honesty in the room of rotten Policy; Virtue and fair Integrity might be in Reputation at Courts, and Statesmen be upright, tho' Bribes lay in their way.

In short, a Christian World would be a very pretty place to live in, and what all good Men would devoutly wish for---But our Deists, out of their great Wit and Wisdom, seem resolved as long as there is Pen to set to Paper to rail on, expose, and blaspheme the best-natured and most social Design that Heaven has thought fit to communicate to Mankind, to lead them to Happiness here and hereafter.

F I N I S.



